



Legal Highs Dumfries and Galloway

Executive Summary

Legal Highs have been receiving increasing attention over the last few years in many areas of the country. In July 2012, Dumfries and Galloway Council noted that this was becoming an increasing problem for them, particularly following the death of a local young person thought to be linked to legal high use.

In a bid to tackle the problem, Community Learning and Development (CLD), in partnership with other community safety partners, planned and implemented a project that aimed to support a group of young people to research a piece of work on the topic of legal highs and to use the evidence gathered to produce an informative media resource that could be used to raise awareness of the dangers of legal highs.

The project took place in July and August 2012 and allowed young people to develop new skills that related to researching, scripting, acting, filming and editing a short DVD that was then used to educate other young people and the wider community on the dangers associated with psychoactive substances.

The project culminated in a red carpet launch event which allowed the young people to showcase the DVD and to host a question and answer session with the community. The DVD has also been uploaded to YouTube - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLqESQJTjvI> - and is now widely used by Police Scotland and secondary schools.

Since the project there has been a marked improvement in the knowledge levels of the young people involved and the relationships between them and the other community safety partners has also improved. As of mid-April 2013 there have been no further drug deaths involving legal highs in Mid Galloway.

This project was runner-up in the 'Innovative Media Campaign' category for the Safer Communities Awards 2013.

Project Background and Aims

As part of their Summer Holiday Programme, CLD had the opportunity to develop a media related project that would allow them to support issue-based work with young people.

The Police statistics for Dumfries and Galloway highlighted that there had been an increase in incidents around the use of legal highs and that there was little awareness of consequences of their use, particularly in the 16-25 age group. A Facebook survey confirmed this showing that fewer than 25% of the young people who completed the survey had any idea of the potentially harmful effects. The death of a young person in the local area from a drug related incident, believed to be legal highs, further emphasised the need for work on this issue.

The main aims of the project were to support young people to research a current issue that affected the 16-25 year age group in rural locations. They were to utilise this research to

produce an informative media resource that could be used to raise awareness, and in this case highlight the dangers of psychoactive substances to their peers.

One of the community safety partners was able to provide expertise, resources and equipment that would enable the young people to produce a DVD at a relatively low cost. This approach had two objectives. Firstly, it allowed the young people to learn new skills and be involved in the researching, scripting, filming, editing and acting in a short film. Secondly, it allowed them to work alongside community safety partners to ensure that the correct information was included in the DVD clip. The involvement of the young people, rather than just community safety staff, meant that the prevention messages were more likely to reach a wider audience.

Activities

Twenty young people were involved in this project and either self-referred or were referred by community safety partners to the group.

Over a three week period, supported by Mid Galloway Youth Work Partnership, the young people worked with community safety partners to carry out research into legal highs to ensure the DVD was factually accurate. Following the research, the group created storyboards, wrote the script, acted, filmed and created the soundtrack to the DVD.

Following the editing of the DVD; copies were distributed to each community safety partner as well as each young person involved with the project. The DVD was uploaded to YouTube and can be accessed at the following link <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLgESQJTjvI>.

To officially launch the DVD, a red carpet premier event was hosted by the local cinema and was open to members of the public with approximately 120 people in the audience. The DVD has since had widespread acclaim and is used by the Police and secondary schools locally, regionally and nationally in drug awareness programmes. The DVD has also been used as an international example by the local sports club and has been presented as recognition of the work undertaken by young people in Scotland to support the dissemination of preventative messages.

Impact

In addition to increased knowledge about legal highs, young people involved were able to gain a wide range of new skills in media and increased levels of self-confidence. Of the young people involved in the project 100% of them stated in evaluations that they had gained new skills in some areas and had increased their self-confidence.

Although there have been no comments on the YouTube video, to date there have been 2500 hits.

The knowledge gained by the young people involved in the project has a wide ranging impact as they are better able and more confident to share information relating to legal highs with their peers, family members and other members of the community. The project also allowed community safety partners such as the Police and the NHS to develop better relationships and a better understanding of the issues affecting young people.

The DVD is also used by the Police and other secondary schools to highlight the issues surrounding legal highs to young people and to other members of the community. To date there have been no further drug deaths involving legal highs in Mid Galloway.

Monitoring and Evaluation

At the start of the project, young people were interviewed to ascertain a baseline on their knowledge of legal highs. Young people and partners were all asked to complete an evaluation at the start, midway through and at the end of the project.

The collated evidence, gathered using interviews and questionnaires and surveys following the project, demonstrated an increased knowledge about the dangers of legal highs, impact of peer pressure and available support services for those involved in the project.

An enhanced relationship between the community safety partners and the young people was also reported, which was particularly positive for some of the young people who had been referred to the project as they were considered at risk of offending.

The young people were also asked to host a question and answer session at the end of the project at the red carpet premier event which allowed them to showcase the extent of their knowledge base. Feedback from this event from young people and parents was also included within the final evaluation with one young person stating that “We learned loads more than we expected – not just about the dangers of legal highs – but also all about film-making”. A parent in attendance said “It was quite an eye-opener to see some of the challenges and situations facing young people today, this project has made me more aware of these issues”

Lessons Learnt and Sustainability

This project was intended to be a one off piece of work and was to be completed in a timeframe of three weeks. It is recognised that it would have been more beneficial to have allocated a longer timeframe and looked initially at how to develop the project so that it could be an on-going piece of work or one that could be replicated in other areas. The evaluation process highlighted that consideration should be given to running the project again as a result of the positive feedback and increased knowledge and awareness levels from the young people and partners alike.

If the project were to run again, there would be consideration given to involving the regional media, for example Borders Television and/or the BBC.

Resources

Funding: Staffing, resources and equipment for the project was provided by community safety partners from the Mid Galloway Youth Work Partnership, Community Learning and Development Dumfries and Galloway Council, Health Improvement, Creetown Initiative, Activity Resource Centre. Assistance in kind from Local Cinema.
£100 was provided by the Machars Lions Club
£100 was provided by the Hollywood Trust

Partners: Dumfries and Galloway Council, Police Scotland, Creetown Initiative, Activity Resource Centre, Police Scotland, Health Improvement Service.

Outcomes

National

4. Our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.
5. Our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed.
6. We live longer, healthier lives.
9. We live our lives safe from crime, disorder and danger.
11. We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others.

Local

Dumfries & Galloway Single Outcome Agreement:

- 2.1 Young people will be supported to make the right choices
- 2.2 We will ensure our young people will have high quality learning experiences and succeed.
- 5.1 Our people and communities will be safe and secure

Police Scotland – Multi-member Ward Plan – Mid Galloway:
We will continue to work closely with our partners to find effective long term solutions to issues raised including substance misuse.

Practice Note Information

Practice Note Title:	Legal Highs – Mid Galloway Youth Productions
Practice Note No:	PN50
SCSN Topic	Personal Safety
Areas:	
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Contact Information

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